WHIRRAKEE

April 2010 Vol. 31 No. 3

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Bob Ruddick, Ben Goonan, Liz Graham, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Gemma Candy

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)

Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)

Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5449 3479 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.

To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 31, No. 3, April 2010
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short notices		3
March notes and observation – (plus a few extras)	Rod and Jan Orr	3
Bats in Rosalind Park	Bill Holsworth	5
Snippets form Victoria Naturally Alliance ebulletin No 27, March 2010	via Stuart Fraser	5
March general meeting, Speaker: Paul Foley	Sabine Wilkens	6
From the mailbag	Elaine Mathison	7
Golden Orb-weaving spider	Rod Orr	7
Victoria Hill Heritage Day	via Elaine Doling	9

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
Some very interesting and unusual events occurred in Bendigo over the last month, giving field-nats plenty of opportunities to be amazed. Grey-headed Flying Foxes moved into Rosalind Park sparking mixed reactions amongst the community (see article on page 5). The collective noun for bats is either a 'colony' or a 'cloud' of bats. Locusts in a group can apparently also be called a cloud (makes more sense than for bats), a swarm or a plague, and such a group descended on Bendigo last Saturday. I have been in Bendigo for 21 years and have never seen such numbers.

Front Page Illustration – Photographer: Tom Burton

A parting shot from Tom Burton. Cherie and Tom are moving to Rowville next month, where they plan to grow one of these plants. The photo is of *Dianella tarda* growing at their place in Mandurang – not a common plant. It flowers late (*tarda* = late) in day, late in year (still flowering in March), has mauve, recurved sepals and petals, yellow anthers....very pretty. This specimen also has a bud and a young fruit, which will later turn into a black berry.

Short Notices

Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Environment Fund – Call for Grant Applications

Funds are available for projects of between $200 and $1000, which are in the areas of environmental research, dissemination of information on the natural environment or biodiversity preservation.

Enquiries: Hali ph 9877 9860,
email admin@fncv.org.au
Applications close April 16th.

March General Meeting Preview
Presenter: Doug Frood, (Pathways Bushland and Environment)
Title: 'Grassy Woodland Restoration'.

Victoria Hill Heritage Day
Sunday 18 April, 2010
From 10am until 4pm
Victoria Hill Historic Reserve Opposite The Gold Mines Hotel, Marong Road Bendigo

Come and Celebrate the Heritage of Bendigo
See pages 9 and 10 for detail

Images still needed for next BFNC publication
In 2008 Darren Green provided the *Whirrakee* with pictures, descriptions and notes about the frogs and reptiles of the Bendigo area. With the help of Dale Gibbons, these have now been revised and compiled into a book, similar to the other books published by the Bendigo FNC. The City of Greater Bendigo has provided some funds towards the publication of the book. We are now sending sections of the book to experts to check for errors, omissions, improvements, etc. before it is printed.

We have a very good collection of pictures from Darren Green, some from Dale Gibbons, and other herpetologists, however, we need a few more pictures that are close-ups showing important characteristics of the species. If you have pictures of the following, please get in touch with Bill Holsworth, ph: 5443 4063
Any of the BLIND SNAKES Typhlopidae, especially the WOODLAND BLIND SNAKE *Ramphotyphlops proximus* and GRAY'S BLIND SNAKE *Ramphotyphlops nigrescens.*
Also, the BLACK ROCK SKINK *Egernia saxatilis* and the MALLEE SPADEFOOT TOAD *Neobatrachus pictus.*

Slides or digital photos are required.
Thank you for your help.

March Notes and Observations
Recorded by Jan and Rod Orr

Elaine Doling:January Bird Observations
"There was much commotion and splashing in our bird bath in the front yard on the afternoon of that 43 degree day in early January. Several Rosellas, Blue-faced Honeyeaters and Noisy Miners all in it together! I would have loved a photo but if I had gone to get the camera I would have frightened them away and they were enjoying the water so I just watched quietly and enjoyed a rare sight. We have a seemingly permanent population of these birds - I wonder if they are used to each other, which may be why they shared the bird bath. They share branches in our Yellow-box tree happily enough.

Talking of rare sights, we saw a Port Lincoln Parrot in the huge Yellow Gum and Ironbarks behind us at about 2:30pm on 24th of January.

I thought I had seen one on the powerlines out the front the day before but it flew away. this time Gary got the binoculars and had a good look at it. The other birds, especially the Noisy Miners, were making a huge fuss about it, which is what attracted our attention.

Are they often seen around here? I have not seen one before. We used to get Buln Buln (Mallee Ring-necks) up near Dubbo.
We live in California Gully where fortunately, many large trees remain.
The Rosellas have bred successfully in both of our nest boxes this year".

February and March Bird Observations:
"Not a great deal to report except that our mimicking Magpie is getting quite cheeky. The Magpies are quite tame and the mimic walked right up to me in the front garden and went "woof, woof, woof!" in perfect imitation of the little fluffy dog over the road. He then gave his full repertoire of every bird in the neighbourhood. It's not every day you get barked at by a bird! He does not do humans yet but, maybe one day he will return my daily greeting of "Hello, Maggie". He (or she) does not imitate our dogs either but has perfected the one over the road. Does anyone know why they do it? The only other bird I have heard that was such a perfect mimic was a Lyrebird at Minnamurra Falls, near Kiama in NSW, who could mimic axes, chainsaws and a babble of human voices."

Ian Magee:
Ian observed an Echidna which hung at full vertical stretch from a stringybark for about 2 minutes. It did not search under the bark and was perhaps scenting the air. It was extended vertically about 50 cm.

Bill Holsworth:
Bill reported that the Bendigo Ring Road project was still being considered seriously by transport planners.

The Kennington Reservoir lakeside development proposal has led to a community meeting to discuss the Heritage implications. This reservoir is the oldest public works infrastructure on the goldfields which is still being used for its original purpose.

Rod Orr
Reported seeing a Grey Butcherbird sampling the figs in his tree (all the other birds nearby were not impressed). New Holland Honeyeaters have also tried to copy the Silvereyes in other years but then spend a lot of time and energy cleaning the sticky figs from their tongues.

Some additional observations that came in after the meeting…

Glenise Moors
About 5 pm on 15th March, I heard Rainbow Bee-eaters and observed five circling and calling high above the paddock next to ours.
As I counted them they increased to become a swirling group of twenty-three birds. This took about 5 minutes and they were quite noisy by then. Suddenly their calls changed to contact 'treek's as they flew off towards the north-west in a line of two's and three's.

Sabine Wilkens
The plague locust *(Chortoicetes terminifera?)* invasion of parts of Bendigo on Saturday 27th March must have been a boom for some birds. I saw a magpie on the nature strip in Flora Hill that seemed to have eaten locusts all day. Its body was almost completely round – so full of food – that I doubted it could fly properly in this state.

Karen Thomas
Below is a photo of a Lesser Long-eared Bat taken on the morning of March 1, at Tom & Cherie Burton's next door. It fell out of an external blind that Tom was letting down. Just after taking these photos it started to become more animated, then flew off and around the corner of the house into its roosting site in the roof space.

Nyctophilus geoffroyi

Bats in Rosalind Park

Compiled by Bill Holsworth

The recent arrival of grey-headed flying foxes (or fruit bats) in the fernery of Rosalind Park got off to a bad start with the press. John Burtonclay and Maurie Lewis were involved in trying to present the facts to the newspaper and Bill Holsworth gathered the information below in this context:

The following information comes from a book *Medicine of Australian Mammals* published by CSIRO Publishing 2008 Edited by Larry Vogelnest and Rupert Woods.

There are 3 viruses associated with bats in Australia; (The rabies virus has not been detected in Australian bats.)
Australian bat layssavirus, (=**ABLV**) found in a variety of bat species throughout Australia has caused the death of 2 persons in Queensland. This virus is related to the rabies virus and first recorded in 1996 and has been found in 4 species of flying-fox and the insectivorous yellow bellied sheathtail bat. It causes several symptoms in bats (twitching, tremors, weakness, inability to fly, vocalisation and overt aggression). Any 'sick' bat should be suspected to have ABLV. The incubation period is similar to rabies (10 days to several months). The risk from clinically normal wild-caught insectivorous Australian bats is very low. The prevalence in fruit eating flying-foxes depends on the species and location, but is about 15% or less.

Hendra virus, (=**HeV**) causes a potentially fatal respiratory illness in humans and horses has been detected in 1994, 1999, and 2004. The virus is resident in flying-fox populations but causes no clinical symptoms in the flying fox species. In 1994 it infected 21 horses and 2 persons in Brisbane (Hendra suburb), Queensland. One person died (the trainer, Vic Rail) the stable hand survived. All Australian flying-fox species are potential reservoirs. Humans, dogs, cats, guinea pigs, and horses excrete the virus in their urine. HeV is not highly contagious. A survey of bat handlers failed to detect evidence of exposure to HeV. It is not certain how the virus spreads to horses, but it has been isolated from uterine fluid and aborted foetal tissue of flying-foxes. Horses could have eaten contaminated pasture plants. Or the pasture could be contaminated with flying-fox urine or saliva-laden chewed up fruit pulp spat out by the bats. Transmission of the virus from horses to people is rare but probably involves physical contact with nasal and oral secretion from very ill horses. Six additional outbreaks occurred in 1994, 1999, 2 in 2004, and 2 in 2006 infecting 7 horses and 2 people. One person died.

Menangle virus is carried by bats and in 1998 caused an outbreak of infertility and deformity in pigs at a piggery at Menangle NSW. Blood tests of two people out of 250 in contact with infected pigs showed that they had contacted the virus and developed mild symptoms. Bats from a nearby roost were antibody-positive for the virus.

That is about the whole story of bats and viruses. More details are available in various veterinary journals and other scientific sources. It is unfortunate that our newspaper editors, journalists and their correspondents have such a poor grasp of science that they do not even know that they should check their facts before publishing uninformed, sensational, and untrue statements.

From the Victoria Naturally Alliance ebulletin No 27 - March 2010

via Stuart Fraser

Surge in feral horse numbers threatens Australian Alps

Feral horse numbers are out of control in the Australian Alps, with the population more than tripling in size since 2003.
The figures, released by the Federal Government's Australian Alps National Parks Co-operative Management Program earlier this week, also show that feral horse numbers

are increasing at close to the fastest breeding rate nature allows.
The results have led the Invasive Species Council to call for aerial shooting in Kosciuszko National Park, one of the areas hardest hit by the population surge.
Feral horses damage the slow-growing alpine and sub-alpine plants of the Australian Alps, foul wetlands, trample vegetation, erode streams, spread weeds, create a vast network of tracks and threaten the safety of motorists.

Hothouse Melbourne engineers a new take on the butterfly effect

Melbourne's butterflies are emerging at least 10 days earlier in spring than they did in 1945, *The Age* newspaper reports, revealing for the first time a causal link between increasing greenhouse gases, the city's warming environment and the timing of a natural event.
Using emergence data on the common brown butterfly dating back 65 years, researchers from Melbourne University said the findings were unequivocal.
"There's very little room to doubt that now," said lead author Michael Kearney, of the zoology department. "Animals are doing things earlier because the climate is warming, because of human activity."

Create habitat for endangered species

The Regent Honeyeater Project has established itself as one of the most active volunteer conservation projects in Australia.
You can be a part of this exciting project, which helps restore remnant box-ironbark habitat for endangered species in the Lurg Hills near Benalla, by joining the upcoming volunteer weekend on 17-18 April.
To register your interest please visit the Regent Honeyeater Project website at
http://regenthoneyeater.org.au/index.php
phone 03 5761 1515,
or email raydavidthomas@hotmail.com

March General Meeting – Speaker: Paul Foley 'Another Tour of the Universe'

Paul is a well-known Bendigo astronomer who regularly writes in the newspaper about heavenly events. He has spoken to the club before, but in his field, there is no shortage of material, and each day, there are bigger and better images availble… He greeted us with an image from the Hubble deep field that was taken of an 'empty' area of space. However, with the shutter of the camera open for three days, the tiny fragment of space, a 120th of a degree (the width of a matchstick head at arms length), shows a different picture, crowded with galaxies and mysteries…

Galaxies, the big and spectacular parts of the universe we can see if they are near enough, only represent about 2% of the universe, the rest we know very little about. A large part of this unknown component of space is dark matter. We cannot see this, but can detect it by its light bending capability.

Whether you are looking down an electron microscope or into a telescope, the sizes you are dealing with become almost incomprehensible. The tricky thing with astronomy is that there is an additional time factor involved, which makes this science all the more mind-boggling. When we are looking at stars and distant galaxies, we are only seeing how they were millions of years ago, as it takes so long for their light to reach us.

There are 1000s of millions galaxies and each galaxy has million and million stars. Virtually all the stars have planets – so how likely is it that ours is the only inhabitable (inhabited) one?

The rings of Saturn are hard to beat – true, but all the other fantastic imagery Paul showed us, the video clips of the birth and death of stars and galaxies and the fate of our own sun over the next few billion years, made me worry so much less about the little 'earthly' things in the weeks afterwards... The vastness of time and space is very good therapy for overworked people! Thank you, Paul.

From the Mailbag

by Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST(FNCV)
October 2009

- This issue contains short reports on studies of two Victorian bryophytes: a moss, Mesochaete Lindberg, and the liverwort genus Acromastigum.

- The major article reports on a study of a journey through the threatened plant community Coastal Moonah Woodland in Victoria. Existing remnants are found in only three parts of the state, and are mostly degraded from human activity and weed invasion.

December 2009

- The butterfly Heath Sand-skipper was found at only three localities in a 1998 survey in Central Gippsland. While the preferred larval food plant, a Saw-sedge, is plentiful the butterfly seems to limit itself to Heathy Woodland, a more uncommon habitat.

- Thirty-one non-marine molluscs have been recorded on several of 100 islands surveyed in Banks and eastern Bass Straits. These comprise a mix of native and exotic snails and slugs.

- Silent lodgers and uninvited guests deals with the arthropods (spiders/flies/moths) found in a suburban house, and describes the interactions that occur.

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THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
October 2009

A number of articles in this issue deal with wetland birds and their habitat.

- Education, by Annette Cook, describes some Wetland Education Centres in various states, and related resources online.

- Mike Schultz of the Fivebough and Tuckerbill Wetlands Trust in New South Wales outlines the management plan developed for this Ramsar Site.

- Controversial Coorong: Jenny Lau reviews the current environmental condition of the area, and looks at some of the actions being considered to overcome the decline in the ecology.

Other articles include:

A Special Area in Townsville
Lyrebirds at Dawn (Sherbrooke Forest, Vic.)

* * * * * *

Also received recently:

***Plains Wanderer** (Echuca BOCA)

***Castlemaine Naturalist**

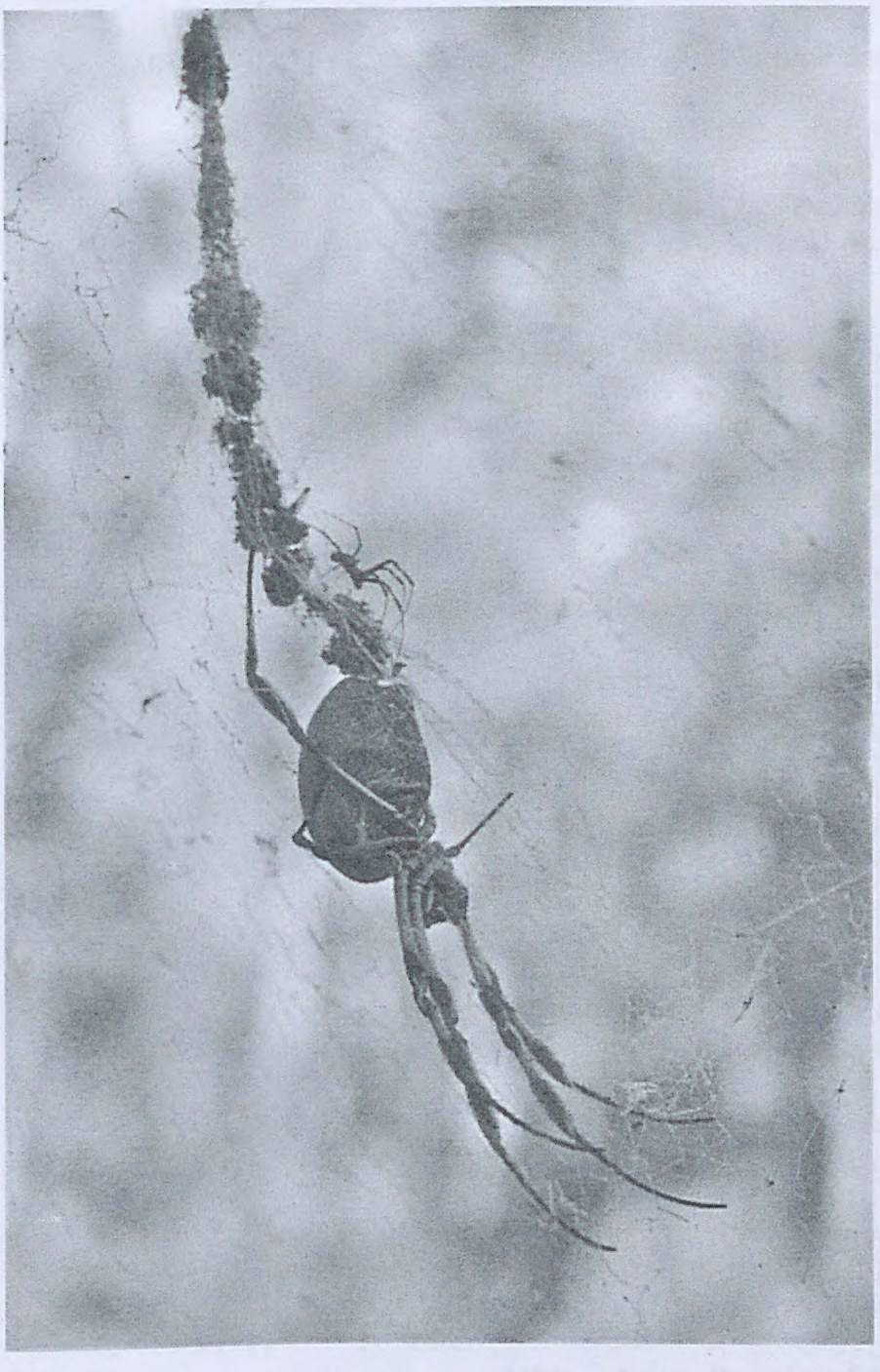
***The Ballarat Naturalist**

***The Geelong Naturalist**

Golden Orb Weavers **Photographer: Rod Orr**

This photo was taken in the One Tree Hill section of the Greater Bendigo Regional Park in early March. It has been a good year for this species and from the close association of the male and female spiders in this photo, next year could be good for them too, weather permitting.

This always looks like attempted suicide, doesn't it? The relatively tiny male spider is risking everything - he wouldn't want to lose concentration or he would become just a small snack for his female companion! The scientific name for this spider is *Nephila edulis*, but I don't know of anyone who has ever tried to eat one of these.



Victoria Hill Heritage Day, Sunday 18 April, 2010 - From 10am until 4pm
Victoria Hill Historic Reserve Opposite The Gold Mines Hotel, Marong Road Bendigo

Programme

Stands/ Displays of the National Trust Bendigo and District Branch, City of Greater Bendigo Heritage - including release of the Ironbark Heritage Study for public viewing, Bendigo Historical Society, Heritage Victoria, Eaglehawk Heritage Group, Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc, Veteran, Vintage and Classic Car Club Bendigo Inc, The Geology of Victoria Hill and Bendigo.
Stands will be on the A Richardson Reserve at the entrance to Victoria Hill, Marong Road

11 am- Rod Fraser, Geology Manager, Bendigo Mining Ltd, will give a presentation about the fascinating geology of the area. Don't miss it!

Victoria Hill Guided Tours
10 am- James Lerk- Bendigo Historical Society
12 noon- George Ellis- Bendigo Cornish Association
1 pm- James Lerk- Bendigo Historical Society
2 pm- Rod Orr- Bendigo Field Naturalists Club
3 pm- David Bannear- Heritage Victoria

Public Talks
To be held in the Courtyard of the Gold Mines Hotel
Talks to begin at 12 noon, as Hotel does not open until 11.45 am.
12 noon Kurt Walder- German Heritage - Miners from the Hartz Mountains
12.30 pm Rod Orr- Bendigo Field Naturalists Club
Mining and the Environment in Bendigo

1.00 pm Dr Michele Matthews- BRAC
Sir John Quick- Forgotten Father of Federation (who spent his youth in the shadow of Victoria Hill)

1.30 pm David Bannear- Heritage Victoria
'Things Forgotten- the archaeology of Bendigo'.

2.00 pm Carol Holsworth- Bendigo Historical Society
The Chinese and the Victoria Hill area.

2.30 pm John Kelly- Bendigo Historical Society
Inquests held at the Gold Mines Hotel

3.00 pm George Ellis- Bendigo Cornish Association
The Cornish miners of the Ironbark Long Gully area.

3.30 pm Amanda Jean- CoGB Heritage Adviser
The Ironbark Heritage Study

Coath Cottage, Happy Valley Road, opposite Victoria Hill. Owner Andrew Ward and Restorer Dr Gary Hill (National Trust Bendigo Branch) will have a display inside the house about the history, destruction on Black Saturday and restoration of the 1860s cottage.

Bendigo Historical Society will operate a BBQ.

Speakers for BFNC General Meetings, April till June 2010

Date	Speaker	Title
14/4/2010	Doug Frood, Pathways Bushland and Environment	"Grassy Woodland Restoration"
12/5/2010	Peter Marriott, Entomological Society of Victoria	"Moths of Victoria"
9/6/2010	Professor Andrew Bennett, Deakin University	"Revegetation in farm land-scapes: are there benefits for wildlife?"

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, April 14 **7.30pm**
Doug Frood, (Pathways Bushland and Environment) will talk about 'Grassy Woodland Restoration'

Wednesday, May 12 **7.30pm**
Peter Marriott (Entomological Society of Victoria) will tell us about moths in Victoria.

Excursions

The Great Dividing Trail Flora & Fauna Mapping excursion will continue in 2010. Watch this space.
Contact for any further detail: Anne Bridley 55493479. For a summary of observed fauna and flora along the trail so far, see page 5ff of the December *Whirrakee*.

Contact Richard Goonan (0423 418 815) if you have comments, questions or suggestions for any other excursions.

Fauna Group

This group normally meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. New and seasoned Club members are most welcome to attend.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Friday 10th April – field trip hosted by **Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club** – Lerderderg River. Meet to car pool at car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke St. Castlemaine for prompt departure at 1.30pm. BYO afternoon tea.

Sunday 25th April - Cactus Killing Field Day run by Parks Victoria and Tarrangower Cactus Control Committee. Location: a property in Waldrons Lane, which lies south off Baringhup Road between Maldon and Baringhup (follow the signs). 10.30 am start, followed by a sausage sizzle lunch at about 12.30 pm. For more info contact Tony Kane phone 5475 2973.

Friends of Box-Ironbark Forests monthly walk

20 June Garfield Wheel & Welsh Village, Castlemaine Diggings NHP
Come on a walk you can do without getting in your car. We'll find a little bit of history and a little bit of bush as we walk across country from Castlemaine to the Garfield Wheel and Welsh Village. 8-10 km easy walking.
For more information ring Deirdre Slattery 54705161 http://www.fobif.org.au/walks.html

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Australian Naturalists' Network – Advance Notice

Sixth ANN Get-together
24 August - 4 September 2010
Host: Chinchilla FNC, Qld
Further enquiries: Kath Truscott, email: ann2010@bordernet.com.au

SEANA 2010 (15 - 18 October)

Advance Notice - based at Foster (Camp Rhumba), Wilsons Promontory Excursions planned.